

**TESTIMONY OF SEAN T. CONNAUGHTON**  
**CHAIRMAN, PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**  
**TO**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM HEARING ON**  
**“OUT AT HOME: WHY MOST NATS FANS CAN’T SEE THEIR TEAM ON TV”**

**APRIL 7, 2006**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Sean T. Connaughton and I am the Chairman of the Prince William County, Virginia Board of Supervisors. I have served in this Countywide elected position since January 2000.

Prince William County is located in Northern Virginia approximately 30 miles south of Capitol Hill on I-95 or 30 miles west on I-66. We are a diverse community of nearly 370,000 people. Approximately 64% of our employed residents commute to jobs outside the County in the District of Columbia, Maryland, or Northern Virginia. The County has many leisure opportunities available for its residents including Manassas National Battlefield, Prince William National Forest Park, and the Potomac Nationals, the “A” farm team of the Washington Nationals.

Like many other communities throughout the region, we were very excited about the return of major league baseball (MLB) to Washington, D.C. as our region had been without a team since 1971. Baseball fans in our region responded by sending 2.7 million customers through the turnstiles of Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium to see the Washington Nationals play in 2005. Fans became even more excited earlier this year when the deal for a new stadium between MLB and the District of Columbia City Council was approved, setting the stage for a transfer of ownership of the team. To many in the community, the transfer of ownership means that a committed owner will make the effort to put championship quality teams on the field year in and year out. It appeared that the Nationals were in an excellent position to grow the team into being an asset for the entire region.

However, the television rights agreement signed by major league baseball and the owner of the Baltimore Orioles in order to compensate for potential revenue losses with the return of MLB to Washington D.C. appears to stand in the way of making the Nationals more competitive. The deal sends the majority of revenues earned from the broadcast rights of Baltimore Orioles and Washington Nationals games to the ownership of the Orioles. Both Orioles and Nationals games will be carried on the Mid-Atlantic Sports Network (MASN), which is owned by the Orioles, starting in 2007. Due to a dispute between MASN and Comcast, which has 1.3 million subscribers in the region, Comcast will not carry MASN. Apparently, this dispute is over money.

As a result, only 40 Washington Nationals games will be broadcast on the Comcast network in the 2006 season. In order to ultimately be successful as a team, the

Washington Nationals need television exposure much greater than 40 times per year. By having the games appear on television, the team builds up a fan base that purchases tickets to games, memorabilia and other goods that benefit the team financially. Over time these fans will build up a base that could rival the devotion of the fans of the Washington Redskins and other professional sports teams. The likelihood of this occurring is negatively impacted by the dispute between MASN and Comcast.

On behalf of the 75,000 households in Prince William County that subscribe to Comcast, I urge that this dispute be resolved quickly. Comcast is not earning any capital from its customers for its refusal to carry the games. The Baltimore Orioles have apparently not been impacted by the arrival of the Nationals as evidenced by its healthy attendance figures in 2005. Those two parties must come to the table and reach a decision that is in the best interests of the people of this region and the national pastime. The national pastime is served best with the widest possible fan base. This dispute contracts that fan base leading to losses for all parties concerned.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be glad to stand for questions.